Article

Title: *Note sur προούσιος et πρόνοια chez Proclus*

Translator's rendering of the title: *Note on προούσιος and πρόνοια in Proclus.*

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Translator's note on method: This is an extremely Greek-dense philological note — nearly every sentence carries an embedded Greek term or phrase. Every one is transcribed in full and glossed literally, immediately after its English rendering; longer quoted sentences are additionally set off in a bordered Greek/Literal panel. The piece also quotes two passages of Latin (William of Moerbeke's translation of Proclus's lost De Providentia et Fato, and Marsilio Ficino's Renaissance Latin translation of Plotinus, Enneads VI.5.7) — these receive the identical transcribe-plus-literal-gloss treatment, labeled 'Latin' rather than 'Greek.' Footnote numbers below are renumbered continuously 1–34 through the whole piece for readability; the footnote list at the end preserves the original per-page citations in order, so it can be cross-checked against the scan. One sentence on p. 86 (before note 25) appears to be missing a word in the scanned original — I have flagged it inline with a bracketed reconstruction.

NOTE ON PROOUSIOS AND PRONOIA IN PROCLUS

As frequent as the term ὑπερούσιος [*hyperousios*, 'supra-essential'] is in Proclus (as it will be in Pseudo-Dionysius), so rare is προούσιος [*proousios*, 'pre-essential']. The latter appears in the *Commentary on Plato's Republic*,[1] in the course of a development meant to show that power (δύναμις) does not coincide with being. Power is spoken of in three senses: prior to essence, essential, and inferior to essence (τριχῶς γὰρ ἡ δύναμις, προούσιος, οὐσιώδης, ἀνούσιος, lit. 'for power [is spoken of] in three ways: pre-essential, essential, non-essential'). We know the privileged place Proclus accords to the superior form of power. This is the first mediation, the one that authorizes the passage from the one to being by causing to burst open, at the heart of the former, the sketch of duality that makes its realization possible.[2]

It might at first seem that the meaning of προούσιος does not differ from that of ὑπερούσιος. It is the same assertion — that one cannot rest content with being in order to justify it. Yet the substitution of πρό ['before'] for ὑπέρ ['above, beyond'] is not

negligible. It marks anteriority rather than superiority; it traces a mental movement that is not a progression toward the beyond, but a regression toward the hither side. The first movement might be the aiming at a pure transcendence; the second is the recognition of a presence too fundamental to be conscious. One no longer seeks to conquer what surpasses us; one attempts instead to turn back toward what always anticipates and invests us.

Let us note that προούσιος is also found in the *De Mysteriis*,[3] precisely in the final part of this treatise, which seems the most boldest, both from a metaphysical and from a mystical point of view. The term in question designates the creator god who himself proceeds from the One. The 'pre-essential' principle is the unity (μονάς) that constitutes essence. One should not forget the religious and spiritual context in which this term is here inserted, nor what presuppositions it implies concerning the ever-enveloping operation of the divinity.

Proclus often uses a word of similar formation, whose corresponding sense can bring us some clarity: πρόνοια, προνοεῖν [*pronoia, pronoein*, 'to be provident, to know/think in advance']. This term is more complex than one first believes, and it is not always sufficient to translate it as 'foresight' or 'providence.' This is only one of its senses, and not the strongest. Προνοεῖν does indeed designate a regulative thought prior to beings, and it is a function of the divine intellect. But because the source of divinity is superior to intellect (θεοῦ δὲ τὸ ἑνίζειν, τὸ γεννᾶν, τὸ προνοεῖν, lit. 'for it belongs to God/the divine to unify, to generate, to be provident'),[4] πρόνοια is first defined as an activity that precedes thought itself:

> 'Where would activity prior to intellect be found, if not among the supra-essential (ὑπερουσίοις)? Πρόνοια, as the name indicates, is the activity prior to intellect (ἐνέργειά ἐστι πρὸ νοῦ, lit. "it is an activity before intellect").'[5]

The treatise *De Providentia et Fato* [On Providence and Fate], of which only the Latin translation by William of Moerbeke survives, is even clearer:

> **Latin:** *Nam πρόνοια quidem eam quae ante Intellectum qualificat omnino operationem, quam soli Bono attribuere necessarium: hoc enim solum Intellectu divinius.*
> **Literal:** *For pronoia indeed altogether qualifies that operation which is before Intellect, which [operation] it is necessary to attribute to the Good alone — for this alone is more divine than Intellect.*

(6)

This interpretation of προνοεῖν can invoke the authority of Plotinus, who, in a vigorous formula, speaks of 'a touch, and so to speak an utterly ineffable and thoughtless contact, prior to the birth of intellect (προνοοῦσα οὔπω νοῦ γεγονότος, lit. "being provident, intellect not yet having come to be"), the toucher in this case not thinking.'[7]

These lines were clear enough to suggest to Proclus the direction he adopted. For the 'pre-noetic' coincidence that Plotinus here recalls is not merely an order superior to intellect, but also a state really (though not chronologically) prior to intellectual activity — an immanence eternally generative of this life. This is confirmed by the argument that follows: 'The thinking [subject] cannot remain simple… it doubles itself.' And one finds in the *Enneads* enough parallel statements concerning the unfolding of intellect by itself out of the one[8] for this assertion to be regarded as a decisive Plotinian thesis.

Plotinus refers intellect not beyond itself, but to the hither side of its own constitution — a constitution that belongs indivisibly both to intellect and to the One. Thought is invited to ascend the course of its own genesis, not in order to annul it, but on the contrary in order to grasp anew its unnoticed origin. Intellect must come to realize that it always arrives too late, since it is born by splitting apart a fundamental immediacy.

Plotinus demands that νοῦς recover its primordial silence — that it turn back, not toward some spectacle it had distractedly passed beyond, but toward the paradisal simplification that is, as it were, the seed of every spectacle and of every gaze.

It is this movement that the Alexandrian [Plotinus] sketches when, comparing the different selves to multiple faces turned toward the outside yet possessing a single center, he wishes that the favor of Athena might convert us to this inner unity. Ficino's translation deserves to be quoted:

> **Latin:** *Quum vero foras prospicimus, neque illuc unde suspendimur aciem dirigamus, merito nos esse unum nequaquam animadvertimus: perinde ac si multi vultus in orbe uno quodam vertice sive intima unaque radice connecterentur. Si quis autem ad intima reflecti posset, sive suapte natura, sive reflectente Minerva, seipsum jam esse Deum universumque conspiceret.*
>
> **Literal:** *But when we look outward, and do not direct our gaze toward that [point] from which we are suspended, we rightly fail utterly to perceive that we are one — just as if many faces [arranged] in a circle were connected by one single vertex, or by one and the same inmost root.*

> *But if someone could turn back toward the inmost things, whether by his own nature or by Minerva turning him back, he would then behold that he himself is God, and the universe.*
>
> ([9])

Proclus suggests the same schema of return upon oneself when, interpreting the myth of Er allegorically, he writes: 'For all these souls, birth is before them, and the divine realities are behind them' (ταύταις γοῦν πρόσω μὲν ἡ γένεσις, ὄπισθεν δὲ τὰ θεῖα, lit. 'for these [souls], then, becoming [is] in front, but the divine things [are] behind').[10]

Of course, in Proclus, the 'pre-essential' is still prior to the 'pre-noetic,' since being is itself prior to intellect. But should one not fear that, in passing from Plotinus to Proclus, this anteriority loses its immanence, so as to cover nothing more than an order wholly external to the self, and that the regression then leads us only toward the extraposed degrees of a hierarchy?

This danger is illusory. For all the degrees of reality are to be found again within the Proclean soul, each according to its own mode. Even though it is particular, one must say, literally, that it is, in its own way, all things in every way.[11] All these degrees preserve, within it, their functional value and their correlations, and thus each refers, from within, to the principles to which it corresponds. There are, in the self, as many modes of apprehension as there are real orders. There is within us an immediate, 'pre-essential' communication.

> 'After [i.e., beyond] the intellect, precious as it is, one must awaken the summit of the soul, by which we are one, and by which the multiplicity within us is unified. Just as we participate in intellect through the intellect we have just spoken of, so we participate in the First — from whom unity comes to all things — through the one, so to speak the flower of our essence, which is our principal attachment to the divine. The like is always grasped by the like: the objects of science by science, the intelligibles by intellect, the most unifying measures of beings by the one of the soul (τὰ δὲ ἑνικώτατα μέτρα τῶν ὄντων τῷ ἑνὶ τῆς ψυχῆς, lit. 'and the most unitary measures of the beings [are grasped] by the one of the soul'). Such is the highest of our activities. Through it we are divinely inspired (ἔνθεοι, lit. 'in-godded, possessed by god')…'[12]

We find a complementary statement in the *De Providentia* already cited:

> **Latin:** *Omnia enim simili cognoscuntur, sensibile sensu, scibile scientia, intelligibile intellectu, Unum uniali. Intelligens quidem etiam anima et seipsam cognoscit et quaecumque intelligit contingentia, sicut diximus. Superintelligens autem et seipsam et illa ignorat, quo adjacens τῷ Uni quietem amat, clausa cognitionibus, muta facta et silens intrinseco silentio… Hanc, o amice, divinissimam entis operationem animae aliquis operans, soli credens sibi ipsi, scilicet flori intellectus…*
>
> **Literal:** *For all things are known by their like: the sensible by sense, the knowable by science, the intelligible by intellect, the One by the unial [unifying faculty]. The intellective [soul], indeed, both knows itself and knows whatever contingent things it understands, as we have said. But the super-intellective [soul] is ignorant both of itself and of those things — whereby, lying adjacent to the One [τῷ Uni — Trouillard's own Greek gloss on 'Uni,' dative of ἕν], it loves rest, closed off from acts of cognizing, made mute and silent with an intrinsic silence… This most divine operation of the being of the soul, O friend — one who performs it, trusting to himself alone, that is, to the flower of the intellect…*

(13)

It is well known that, for Proclus, everything of the order of the one lies beyond being. The 'one of the soul' is what allows us to ascend to the hither side of 'our simplest thoughts,' and of the intelligible, and of essence itself. It is the point of emergence of divine inspiration.[14]

Another passage offers us, on this point, a more explicit teaching. In his *Commentary on the Republic*, Proclus is concerned to show that poets, uplifted by a divine motion, are not, from this point of view, answerable to the common rules. There are three forms of life within the soul: the life of enthusiasm, the life of intelligence, and the life of imagination and sensation.

> 'The best and most perfect life is that by which the soul attaches itself to the gods, living in close affinity, in a union of profound likeness with them — a life that is not its own, but that of the gods (οὐχ ἑαυτῆς οὖσαν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐκείνων, lit. "not being its own, but of those [gods]"). Then the soul, surpassing its own intellect, awakening the ineffable cipher of the unitive subsistence (ἑναίας ὑποστάσεως, lit. "of the henadic/unitive subsistence") of the gods, attaches like to like — to that light, its own light; to the One that is above all essence and life, the most-one point (τὸ ἑνοειδέστατον, lit. "the most unity-formed") of its own essence and its own life.'[15]

It is clear that these testimonies, chosen from very different points in Proclus's work, do not point us toward a pure transcendence. It is not to some external cause that we must convert, but to the deepest of the soul's operations — the one that precedes its being as soul, as intellect, as essence. For one must not forget that, according to the best Neoplatonism, the most elevated is always the most fundamental, and that within us the most complex is the self-multiplication of the most simple, or, as it were, the diffusion of a center: οἷον κέντρον διαστάν [literally: 'as it were a center extended/spread out'].[16] The center of our soul is precisely 'the pre-essential power' that makes us eternally pass from the one to being.

Let us underscore some of the characteristics of the 'pre-essential' and the 'pre-noetic.'

We have said that these are not merely states, but operations. One must, however, transcend every category of production and action without falling short of efficacy, since they cause intelligibles and thoughts to appear. This fulguration has as its proper quality that of being a communication far more than an indigenous activity. The 'one of the soul' is the One itself, prior to every diversifying procession. It is, therefore, that within us which cannot be particularized, nor participated in, nor limited, nor assimilated to any derivation whatsoever. It is to this that our ἑνάς [henad, 'unit'] refers us, and it can only be a pure presence.

This is why Proclus readily speaks of 'divine possession' (κατοκωχή),[17] of 'an inebriation under the effect of the nectar, generative of all knowledge' (μεθύουσα… τῷ νέκταρι καὶ ὅλην γεννῶσα τὴν γνῶσιν, lit. "being drunk… with the nectar and generating the whole of knowledge").[18] The soul is 'exiled from its own manners of acting' (τῶν σφετέρων ἠθῶν ἐξιστάμενον, lit. "standing outside of its own characteristic dispositions").[19] It is no longer either intellect or being. Or rather, it is not yet either the one or the other.

But this excessive plenitude also presents itself as a fecundation, or as a germ. The soul is not only concentric with the One, but is pregnant with every order of being and knowledge. We have just seen this. The Principle gives birth to clarity through us. For, according to Neoplatonism, each order engenders all those that follow it, and this within each being — so that every intellect and every soul are 'self-constituting': ἡ ψυχὴ ἄρα αὐθυπόστατος καὶ ἑαυτὴν ὑφίστησιν [literally: 'the soul, therefore, is self-subsistent and constitutes itself'].[20]

Each self is the author of everything that is within it, because it first communicates with the radical, ontogenic spontaneity that pours forth into it, in a single stroke, both the Infinite and the finite.

Commenting on Plato's myth of Er, Proclus seeks to show that every soul is responsible for its earthly condition, and hence for its destiny, according to Plato's phrase: *αἰτία ἑλομένου* [literally: 'the responsibility [belongs] to the one who chose'].[21] It has the life it deserves, the milieu it has chosen, the landscape that resembles it.

By a kind of inner judgment, the soul is carried to the rank it deserves, 'from the Good down to Tartarus,' that is, down to the most primitive animal forms.[22] For this choice, it makes according to 'infallible criteria' (*κριτήρια ἄπταιστα*, lit. "unstumbling criteria") or

'depraved rules' (*μοχθηροῖς κανόσι*, lit. "with base rules").[23] But these latter are not on the same level as the former. Only the use of the former allows one, in choosing a lot, to choose oneself. Proclus has the god who presides over the choosing address the following discourse to the depraved soul:

> 'I have placed in you certain criteria, and others beneath you. And you, entirely disdaining the criteria that are within you, grant all your favor to those that are beneath you, blinding, by means of these latter, the criteria that are within you by essence.'[24]

These substantial criteria are *νοῦς* and *λόγος*, which alone allow the soul to discern the best reasons among the forms it contains.[25] The casting of lots and the offering of allotments figure an invitation, addressed to each soul, to 'awaken, each to its own proper forms' (*ἀνεγειρόμεναι πρὸς τὰ οἰκεῖα ἕκασται εἴδη*, lit. "each [soul], being awakened, toward its own proper forms").[26] But this amounts to recovering the universality and the measure proper to intellect. Only such a choice made in clarity, whatever condition is adopted, constitutes a judgment. To choose otherwise is to yield to sleep.

This is why everything that happens to us is *κατὰ δίκην* ['according to justice, justly']. The myth aims to make us understand that the initiative of the self always underlies necessity and fortune, according to Iamblichus's phrase: *αὐτοὶ ἑαυτοῖς ἐσμεν ἐν τύχης τάξει καὶ δαίμονος* [literally: 'we ourselves are, for ourselves, in the place of fortune and of daimon'].[27]

Another characteristic of the 'pre-essential' is that it manifests itself to us in negative form. Proclus tells us that the mode in which principles appear to their derivatives *[is*

negative] (the scanned text appears to be missing a word here; bracketed reconstruction mine).[28] But this is infinitely more true of what is prior to all intelligibility. 'The one is identical with non-being,' provided that we represent this non-being not φανταστικῶς ['imaginatively'], but ἐνθεαστικῶς ['by way of divine inspiration/possession'].[29] Under this condition, 'the one of the soul' is the negation of its being, just as the divinity of intellect is the negation of its spirituality: τῷ … μὴ νῷ θεός [literally: 'god by … not [being] intellect'].[30]

> 'The one that is prior to being is non-being (τὸ δὲ αὖ πρὸ τοῦ ὄντος ἓν μὴ ὂν μέν ἐστιν, lit. "but the one, again, that is before being, is indeed non-being"), yet not nothing… Let us name and think this non-being by means of what resembles it in ourselves, for there is in us a certain seed of that non-being (ἐν ἡμῖν ἔνι τι σπέρμα ἐκείνου τοῦ μὴ ὄντος, lit. "in us there is a certain seed of that non-being").'[31]

As a principle of purification, the one is less that which is denied than that which denies within us — the very act of negation: ταὐτὸν τῷ τῇ ἀποφάσει τὸ ἕν [literally: 'the one is identical with that which [belongs] to negation'].[32] This negation born of superabundance is thus distinguished from material privation. It possesses an inexhaustible source of affirmations: τοῦτο τὸ εἶδος τῆς ἀποφάσεως γεννητικόν ἐστι τοῦ πλήθους τῶν καταφάσεων [literally: 'this kind of negation is generative of the multitude of affirmations'].[33] That which engenders affirmation within us, detaching it from itself, is in no way an object set before us. The focal point of objectivity must be recovered through analysis and stripping-away.[34] For negation itself, being inspired, does nothing but release the very spring of refusal. And this is the one thing that cannot be refused.

Let us sum up. Since the regressive movement is costly and its terminus unthinkable, it is natural that the πρό ['before'] should be figured by the ὑπέρ ['above, beyond'], the original by the subsequent, and even by the accident in the double sense of addition and of event. But Proclus agrees with Plotinus in perceiving, in this transcending movement, the sign of an unconditioned foundation. The supra-essential is the projection of the absolute initiative from which all essence and every form of life proceed. The 'pre-essential' is thus what makes everything appear, yet necessarily remains on the hither side of every appearance, because it is prior to intelligibility itself. It is not even hidden — which would still suppose a veiled clarity — but, whatever one does, it is 'already there,' since it is presupposed by every question. In Proclus, then, we rediscover the

Plotinian paradox of a salvation given, in some sense, before being, and yet the very realizer of essence. Divine union is 'pre-ontological' as well as 'pre-noetic.'

Jean Trouillard

Footnotes (renumbered 1–34 continuously; original per-page citations preserved below)

p. 80 — 1. In Rempublicam, ed. Kroll, I, 266. 2. Cf. Theologia platonica [Platonic Theology], ed. Portus, III, 7, 20. 3. De Mysteriis, ed. Parthey, VIII, 2; X, 5.

p. 81 — 4. In Parmenidem, ed. Cousin, 1864, VI, 1047. 5. The Elements of Theology, ed. Dodds, 1933, prop. 120; cf. 134. — Cf. In Timaeum, ed. Diehl, I, 415. 6. ed. Cousin, 1864, 151. 7. Enneads, V.3.10.

p. 82 — 8. For example, Enneads III.8.8. I have cited the principal texts in 'La genèse du plotinisme' [The Genesis of Plotinism], Revue philosophique de Louvain, Nov. 1955, p. 475, and in my paper to the Bergson Congress. Plotinus even regards the passage from mystical solitude to thought as a kind of fall. 9. Enneads, Basel, 1580, VI.5.7. 10. In Rempublicam, ed. Kroll, II, 281.

p. 83 — 11. In Alcibiadem, ed. Westerink, 320–321. 12. Ibid., 247. 13. [Cousin, 1864,] 172. — Cf. In Parmenidem, VI, 1081; In Timaeum, ed. Diehl, III, 72.

p. 84 — 14. Cf. In Parmenidem, VI, 1071. 15. In Rempublicam, ed. Kroll, I, 177. 16. In Euclidem, ed. Friedlein, 154.

p. 85 — 17. In Rempublicam, I, 180. 18. In Parmenidem, VI, 1047, 1080. 19. In Rempublicam, I, 180. 20. Elements of Theology, prop. 189. 21. In Rempublicam, II, 277. 22. Ibid., 145, 310.

p. 86 — 23. Ibid. [In Rempublicam], 277–278. 24. Ibid., 278. 25. Ibid., 193, 277. 26. Ibid., 280. 27. Protrepticus, ed. Pistelli, 12. 28. Cf. In Euclidem, 94. 29. In Parmenidem, VI, 1081–1082. 30. Ibid., 1047.

p. 87 — 31. Ibid., 1082. 32. Ibid., 1081. 33. Ibid., 1075, 1077. 34. Cf. In Alcibiadem, 179–180.